

## Uses of the imperfect

The imperfect tense is used to express the following:

1. Descriptions in the past  
Ellos **eran** muy simpáticos. *They were (used to be) very kind.*
2. An action that went on for a period of time in the past that is not specific, with no reference to its beginning or end  
Él me **miraba** mientras yo **trataba** de recoger los papeles. *He was looking at me while I was trying to pick up the papers.*
3. A customary, habitual or indefinitely repeated action in the past. One of the best ways to recognize this use is to think of the English *used to, was, or would*  
Los domingos **caminaba** por la playa. *On Sundays I used to (would) walk on the beach.*
4. The background or setting in which an action took place  
Hacía un viento tremendo cuando salimos de la escuela. *It was extremely windy when we left school.*  
Elena **corría** por la acera y de repente se cayó. *Elena was running on the sidewalk and all of a sudden she fell.*
5. Time of day in the past  
Eran las tres de la tarde. *It was three o'clock in the afternoon.*
6. Age in the past  
El director **tenía** sesenta años. *The director was sixty years old.*
7. A mental or physical state of being in the past. In the past, nonaction verbs such as *saber, conocer, querer, estar, creer, and tener* are usually in the imperfect  
Tú no **conocías** Lima muy bien. *You didn't know Lima very well.*  
Estaba alegre mientras **tenía** con quien jugar. *I was very happy while I had someone to play with.*

## Common expressions with the imperfect

Expressions that emphasize the customary, habitual, or repetitive nature of a past action are often used with the imperfect. Some of these expressions are

generalmente	normalmente	a veces
constantemente	todos los días, todas las tardes, etc.	con frecuencia
siempre	cada día (semana, mes, etc.)	por lo general
todos los días	de costumbre	regularmente
frecuentemente	a menudo	